

Spring 5-3-2017

Jim Crow's Racial-Gender Inequality

Jordan S. Adams

Southern Adventist University, jordanadams@southern.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://knowledge.e.southern.edu/hist_studentresearch



Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Adams, Jordan S., "Jim Crow's Racial-Gender Inequality" (2017). *Student Research*. 8.
http://knowledge.e.southern.edu/hist_studentresearch/8

This Proceeding Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the History and Political Studies at KnowledgeExchange@Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Research by an authorized administrator of KnowledgeExchange@Southern. For more information, please contact jspears@southern.edu.

Jim Crow's Racial-Gender Inequality

Jordan S. Adams

Mark Peach

HIST-297-A

May 1, 2017

America has a long rich history, but like most nations that practiced imperialism there are aspects of it that seem to be largely disregarded, but are still relevant. Those that face challenges, such as minorities, were resilient when it came to survival. One such group of minorities, the African-American community, faced much persecution from the dominant group of Americans merely because of the correlation of skin tone with culture. With this in mind, the government enacted social policies that pertained to minorities. In addition to this, society also portrayed that women were not equal to their male counterparts. This theory of inequality amongst genders was and still is archaic rationale, although for the time it was not uncommon to see it in practice. To understand the struggle of females within the South, particularly females of color, individuals need to analyze the dynamics of culture, along with social policies. Within this paper I will be discussing these three different elements, and how they would have influenced African-Americans, specifically speaking females within the medical field.

Towards the end of the reconstruction era within the Southern states, much segregation arose amongst the various skin tones of America. To put it simply, those of lighter tones such as Northern European descendants correlated their pigment with that of the “ideal American.” Those of darker color such as Hispanic, African and other minority decent were viewed as alien, or foreigners to the Anglo-American culture. These theories of racial alienation gave birth to racial inequality that would in turn cultivate the Jim Crow laws. In those days, many white Americans discriminated against individuals based solely on their ethnicity or race. “Evidence even points to African-Americans being allowed many privileges within the earlier part of the period,”¹ meaning that in early parts of the Jim Crow era, many minority groups particularly, the

¹ C. Vann Woodward, *The strange career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

African-Americans, assimilated within American society. African-Americans pursued happiness to the extent that many served in political offices. There were instances where they represented their constituents in local councils, state legislatures and, on the federal level, congress. However, towards the turn of the century, the African-American community ceased having autonomy over their own lives, so much so that they were forced into a state of mass segregation; many white-American elitists inferred, “that it was unthinkable that they should ever be permitted to vote.”² It is not that segregation was an issue, as actually many African-Americans did not view it as the problem, rather the real issue lied in racial culture.³ In Newby’s book, *The Development of Segregationist Thought*, He urges individuals to look at these matters from different perspectives. Segregationists, whether racist or not, believed in the alienation of races throughout all spectrums of life. Claiming that each race or culture deserved respect in terms of preserving its cultures. In other words, each culture should have the right to have autonomy from one another. As was stated earlier, this was the best way to preserve individual culture, or at least that was the rationale of a minority. Within the Jim Crow South, there might have been the occasional few who believed in such a theory, but the vast majority viewed such policy with racial intent. During the twentieth century, segregationists thought was focused on the science, history, religion, and social sciences of the races. The aim was to proof Caucasian superiority over inferior races.⁴ Even traditionalists had similar ideas regarding women equality within the work force.

² Ibid, 106.

³ Anne M. Valk and Leslie Brown. *Living with Jim Crow: African American women and memories of the segregated South*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

⁴ Idus A. Newby, *The development of segregationist thought* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968), 2,3,4.

It was never common for female African-Americans, particularly in the South, to enter medical professions, or the work force in general due to the very nature of what culture was like in the South. In contrast, the North already had numerous female African-American physicians, the first, being Rebecca Lee Crumpler, during the Civil War.⁵ These women experienced being some of the first females of color in the medical field in the South. One such individual, Emma Rochelle Wheeler, faced tremendous discrimination for not only being of color, but being a woman as well. Emma was born during the year of 1882, 10 years after segregation began. Like majority of the inhabitants within the African-American community during that time, Emma faced the challenges not only from segregation, but from discrimination due to her gender. Women during that time were not viewed as being able to do a man's job, even though historically speaking woman within the profession of the medical field were around in ancient times. However, this began to change in Europe during the middle ages/ early modern period, perhaps due to religion. Nonetheless, it was not until the 1800s that women within the English world would began to work in the medical field again.⁶ This very well could have been influenced by the Civil War, along with other such eras. One example, would have been the industrial age, where most individuals had to work to provide for families. This certainly would have been the case for the early twentieth century where race aside, most Americans had to work to provide.

However, one aspect that would set Emma apart from rural communities was her upbringing. Unlike most African-Americans at the time, being born into a wealthy family would

⁵ "Alumni Share Experiences: Black History at BUSM." Alumni Share Experiences: Black History at BUSM

⁶ Ellen Singer More, Elizabeth Fee, and Manon Parry, *Women Physicians and the cultures of medicine* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009).

have surely elevated her social status not only to her peers, but that of the white community as well. However, most wealthy black families were seen as being “white washed,” by their peers. To put it simply, they faced prejudice from both sides. Growing up Emma’s parents must have stressed the ideals of education, because she would later grow up to become a physician. Around the age of six, Emma contracted an eye problem which prompted her father to take her to an eye doctor. It was there that Emma Wheeler would begin to take interest in medicine. Within the Jim Crow South, education, self-respect, and pride were close to the only ways of battling racism. With a proper education, a child could grow up to become economically stable, this would have helped with prejudice from white society. Self-respect and pride from the parents would encourage a child to have respect for herself and pride herself in her abilities. These aspects were not uncommon amongst black communities, although these lessons were not taught to everyone.

⁷ Later, Ms. Wheeler enrolled in Cookman Institute in Jacksonville. Cookman Institute was founded in the late 1800’s and served as a purpose for higher learning for African-Americans specializing in religion and academia. Segregation was rampant within America at the time, but so was corruption. In some instances African-American schools had their funds embezzled by people on the board. One such college in Georgia had its secretary inflate the number of students enrolled. Corruption was a problem, yes, but whether the institution Emma went to was, was unknown. Once Emma Wheeler graduated from Cookman, she married Joseph R. Howard. A year later he died from a case of typhoid fever. Emma, having been pregnant during the time of Joseph’s death, later gave birth to a boy.⁸

⁷ Anne M. Valk and Leslie Brown, *Living with Jim Crow: African American women and memories of the segregated South*.

⁸ "Emma Rochelle Wheeler." Emma Rochelle Wheeler.

After her son was born, the two moved to Nashville, TN, where she attended Walden University in the year of 1905, during the progressive era of President Theodore Roosevelt. During this era the economy flourished allowing for many individuals both men and woman, to achieve a better life, just as Emma Wheeler did for herself. Upon graduating from Walden, she became not only a doctor, but a wife to Dr. John N. Wheeler. After the graduation, the two traveled from Nashville to Chattanooga where they would start up their medical practice. For black physicians, they faced tremendous adversity with their medical degrees in comparison with their white counterparts. Normal physicians during that time could open clinics virtually anywhere without question or worry. African-American physicians though, faced numerous questions: for example, where could they practice, and would it be stable income? During such events as the Jim Crow laws, the South was very undesirable for those with medical degrees. The major influence for the ambitious individuals to get medical degrees was to leave poverty behind.⁹ Emma and John would have used this ambition to climb the social ladder to help prevent themselves from succumbing to poverty. After practicing together for roughly ten years on Main Street, the Wheelers expanded the business to include East Eighth Street. This new area would be dedicated as Walden Hospital; it was opened and paid full by Dr. Emma Wheeler.

In terms of jobs within the medical field, according to Thomas J. Ward, whites received funding from their families or the government for advancements. However, for African-Americans, if any advancements were to be made within their respected hospitals, it had to come from their own earnings. Examples such as these indicate mass discrimination towards minority communities from public medical funding. The first African-American medical institution,

⁹ Thomas J. Ward, *Black physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2003).

Meharry Medical college, to receive government funding would receive funding until 1948. It received its funding due to the Southern Regional Education Pact (SREP).¹⁰ Respectively, this would have been forty years after Emma Wheeler graduated from Walden University's Meharry Medical College, the same institution mentioned earlier. After the SREP was set up, many African-American medical colleges began to receive funds from the government, a further step for equality within the medical field.

However, during the time of the early 1900s until 1964, there was still mass segregation, meaning that even though Dr. Emma opened a hospital, that only catered to African-Americans. Not only would this be troubling for overall community life, but it would put pressure on her in the work place. In addition, Florence Ridlon's book, *A Black Physician's Struggle for Civil Rights*, discusses how there was division within the African-American community. The African-American community faced not only social division, they also endured economic division. Just as the White-Americans faced division, so did the free African-Americans. There was the aristocracy, the middleclass, and the lower class.¹¹ Though she talks about this being placed during the practice of the slave trade, there is no doubt that the three classes still existed even in the twentieth century. Having been raised by a wealthy African-American family, she was in essence a part of the upper class within the African-American community. Sadly, though, it would have still been possibly considered below the lower class of white Americans.

The problem that Emma faced was not just Jim Crow laws, but a discriminating/racist culture. It would not be until 1954 that segregation would come into question as inherently

¹⁰ Ibid, 41.

¹¹ Florence Ridlon, *A black physician's struggle for civil rights* (Albuquerque, MD: University of New Mexico, 2005).

unequal. Segregation then would be eliminated by *Brown v. Board of Education* in the 1960's.¹² This allowed desegregation, bringing an end to discriminating public policy. This began a slow and gradual decline of a prejudice culture. Around the time of the Great Depression, many African-American institutions began closing their doors due to the massive economic problems the nation faced. Whether or not Emma Wheeler and others in the medical field were affected by this is unknown, but given the severity of the situation, it is highly probable that she, along with other African-Americans, faced tremendous turmoil compared to the white community. From 1932 to 1942, the number of black physicians dropped due to the second world war. This impact would cause the number of black physicians in the South to drop from 2,295 to 2,018,¹³ leaving one African-American physician for every 4,913 person of color, according to Thomas J. Ward Jr. The issue with this was there were few who were willing to relocate to places where there were black communities in need of physicians. This ultimately hindered growth in many African-American communities in the rural parts of the Jim Crow South. Most forms of infrastructure, segregation aside, were located towards the cities and still are to a degree. The further away from the cities a person was, the more rural communities existed, which ultimately encouraged black physicians to practice near the cities. More people meant an increase in business revenue. From a financial standpoint, African-Americans within the medical field would have to practice in the cities to refrain from poverty and further racial injustice. Even though racism and discrimination were spread throughout the South, it was worse in the rural areas compared to the urban cities. Sadly, this would perpetuate a lack of development with increases of discrimination, racism, and lynchings within the rural areas. Such atrocities were

¹² "Documents Related to *Brown v. Board of Education*." National Archives and Records Administration.

¹³ Florence Ridlon, A black physician's struggle for civil rights

sometimes ignored by local law enforcement. With the urban development cities, there might be some sort of difference in regard to justice from white on black crime. In theory law enforcement was not particularly active within the rural areas to begin with. Part of this has to do with crime rates in urban areas in comparison to rural communities. Aside from the negative aspects of segregation, it allowed for the African-American community that was virtually already segregated due to racial tension cultivating post-Civil War, to have a sense of community. This provided African-Americans with their own neighborhoods, schools, churches, business, clubs, and professional/voluntary associations.¹⁴ These different attributes created an entirely new culture/ society within the communities. The new institutions provided various purposes such as, assistance, support, security, and encouragement with the communities. As African-Americans were able to come together, the communities provided a safe haven for future generations. This provided a sense of belonging as opposed to the outside world where degradation and insults were normal.¹⁵ In addition to this, these different areas provided support for socialization within the African-American community. It would have been highly that likely Emma Wheeler would have taken full advantage of the opportunity.

Other issues that those in the medical field may have faced, would have been poverty and property. Most individuals who were not white-American tended not to own property, at least not in urban areas meaning they were not autonomous of their own lives to a degree. In Loren Schweninger's book, *Black Property Owners in the South 1790-1915*, she concludes that African-Americans were more likely to live in towns and cities than in rural areas.¹⁶ The influx

¹⁴Anne M. Valk and Leslie Brown. *Living with Jim Crow: African American women and memories of the segregated South*.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 113

¹⁶ Loren Schweninger, *Black property owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

of African-Americans in the urban cities caused massive issues in terms of property. Many of these people were unable to afford places to stay, ending up in rundown parts of town. Many migrants from rural areas travelled to urban settlements for economic opportunity, and Emma Wheeler was one such individual. Having been raised in Florida she travelled to Tennessee for education, and rather than going home, she stayed for economic purposes. In addition to this, many people from numerous cultures were flocking to the cities for economic opportunity. It would not be until generations later that individuals would migrate to the rural areas, further establishing these regions into suburban footholds.

It is crucial for every individual to put aside perceived notions and bias of what we assume to be correct. To understand the struggle of females of color within the Jim Crow South, cultural aspects, along with governmental policies/theories are important to evaluate. Through evaluation of these elements, we can gain insight as to what African-Americans would have experienced through the early nineteen-hundreds.

Bibliography

- Altman, Susan. "Emma Wheeler was an early caregiver." African American Registry. 1997.
Accessed January 29, 2017.
- "Alumni Share Experiences: Black History at BUSM." Alumni Share Experiences: Black History at BUSM | School of Medicine. Accessed March 26, 2017.
- Aptheker, Herbert, and Du Bois William E. B. *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States: From Colonial Times Through the Civil War*. New York, NY: Citadel Pr., 1962.
- Benjamin, Lois. *The Black Elite: Facing the Color Line in the Twilight of the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1991.
- Bowser, Benjamin P. *Black Male Adolescents: Parenting and Education in Community Context*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1991.
- "Documents Related to Brown v. Board of Education." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed March 29, 2017.
- "Emma Rochelle Wheeler." Emma Rochelle Wheeler. Accessed January 29, 2017.
- Lin, Ann Chih., and Sheldon Danziger. *Coping with Poverty: The Social Contexts of Neighborhood, Work, and Family in the African-American Community*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Newby, I. A. *Jim Crow's Defense Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968.
- Newby, Idus A. *The Development of Segregationist Thought*. Homewood: The Dorsey Press, 1968.

More, Ellen Singer, Elizabeth Fee, and Manon Parry. *Women Physicians and the Cultures of Medicine*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

"Old Walden Hospital Getting New Life." Old Walden Hospital Getting New Life - Chattanooga.com. Accessed January 29, 2017.

Ridlon, Florence. *A Black Physician's Struggle for Civil Rights*: Edward C. Mazique, M.D. Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 2005.

Rose, Peter Isaac, Stanley Rothman, and William J. Wilson. *Through Different Eyes Black and White Perspectives on American Race Relations*. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Schweninger, Loren. *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.

"Walden Hospital." Walden Hospital | Entries | Tennessee Encyclopedia.

"Walden University (1865–1925) | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed." Accessed January 29, 2017.

Ward, Thomas J. *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*. Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2003.

Wheeler, Emma Rochelle (1882-1957) | The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed. Accessed January 29, 2017.

Woodward, C. Vann. *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. 2d rev.ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

Valk, Anne M., and Leslie Brown. *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.